

socialist VOICE



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Semi-Insurrection in Argentina

**Mass movement
against
the government
and
imperialism**



**Anti-war movement against US
must continue**

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What is the International Socialist League?

The ISL strives to assist the working class to build a world international party that can unite common people of the world in a struggle for socialism. That will entail the abolition of the present rule of the planet by the powerful transnational capitalist companies who with their ruthless greed for profit are the central threat to the present and the future well being of the masses of common people of the world and a threat to the earth itself.

The ISL is a section of the International Workers League (fourth international). In its statutes our international organisation says:

The purpose of the International Workers' League is to overcome the crisis of leadership of the workers' movement and build a Fourth International with mass influence...

The IWL (fi) does not claim to be the revolutionary leadership of the world proletariat, nor does its existence imply that the crisis of the Fourth International has been overcome. However, it constitutes the only democratically centralised world organisation struggling for these aims.

The IWL (fi) reaffirms that the crisis of revolutionary leadership will be solved in the course of mobilising the masses by means of agreements and alliances with other tendencies and organisations that, at the behest of the masses, may join the struggle against the counter-revolutionary apparatuses..."

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- 1 Socialist Voice is the Journal of the International Socialist League.
- 1 Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the ISL.
- 1 We welcome contributions and comments from readers.
- 1 Subscriptions cost £5 for six issues including postage.

Fight for services is a fight for control

In 1945, millions of Labour supporters, in and out of uniform, angry at the deprivation in the 1930s, put in a Labour Government that enacted a National Health Service. Now there are the scandals of a crumbling Health Service, once the best, but today the worst, in Europe.

Last year 700,000 people who were well enough to leave hospital could not do so because there was nowhere for them to go. The Liberal Democrat MP, Paul Burrow, who obtained the figures from Parliamentary questions, said of the crisis in the NHS: "This means at its most grotesque waiting in hospital for someone to die in a care home before the council will fund a new placement." Care homes close and the result is, as the MP told *The Times*, "1,400 bed-years of lost hospital time, and 88,000 operations which could otherwise have been done."

The results of the privatisation policies of Tory and New Labour governments pour down on those who work in and those who use the service industries. Meanwhile the government continues with its policies of splitting up and dividing them in the interests of private profit and the Fat-Cats and with an aim to break up workers organisation.

In the deepening crisis in the Health Service, the Government proposes to institute a plan for further 'profitisation' of the Health Service that the Tory Government was afraid to put in fifteen years ago, believing it would engender too much opposition!

The Labour Health Minister, in the middle of January announced that the most successful NHS hospitals were to be freed of government control. Private companies will run the hospitals and doctors can buy from them.

The Guardian of January 16 reported a storm of protest at Milburn's proposition that managers of the top performing 'three star' hospitals will be encouraged to take jobs in running them. As Simon Jenkins of *The Times* told us (16 January), you can "join a big five accountancy firm and run trains and railways at the same time."

Frank Dobson, who was removed as Health Secretary to make way for Mr Milburn and who was Blair's candidate against Livingstone in the London mayoral election, was moved to comment in Parliament: "In the private sector, managers are not likely

to have the appropriate expertise because most private sector hospitals are small, low tech and have very few emergency admissions." He asked Milburn: "Would you guarantee that none of these outside managers come from private-sector disasters such as Railtrack, Equitable Life and Marconi?" The London convenor of Unison said on the day of Milburn's announcement that the "Government is engaged on a suicidal mission to do a Railtrack on the NHS."

There were reports in the press that Milburn had caused 'a storm' after he put the government's propositions on the NHS. Let us remember there was a 'storm' at the beginning of January, when over £14 million was paid to senior executives who presided over the ravages of Railtrack! Trade Union leaders called for Government action. It was certainly a case of asking the fox to protect the chickens.

Left to New Labour, scandals of the health service, safety and the railways; scandals on housing are due to come one after the other in 2002.

The General Secretary of the Royal College of Nursing declared that the Government appeared to have a 'pick and mix' approach to running the NHS in which it will be unclear who is in charge and accountable. This is likely to lead to increased bureaucracy." It is, however, more than bureaucracy that is involved. The leaders are sitting on a great anger in the unions of nursing and health staff, of patients and their families and of railway workers and passengers whose lives are blighted and frustrated daily by the chaos of privatisation.

You cannot solve the scandals of all the service industries by making piecemeal adjustments. It is a question of planning, and workers and users' control. The issue both in the railways and the NHS is whether they are to be run for social needs or for private profit. New Labour is tied indissolubly to the profit motive, and is dedicated to destroy any power that can be expressed by the working class. New Labour was formed to eject the power of organised labour – the trade unions – from the Labour Party. It speeded up the destruction of democracy in local government. It has been completely revealed as a servant of big capitalists. It is not just small changes that are needed but reorganisation and planning that means a class difference in the

Diary of a semi-insurrection

by Elizabeth Rolazo, our correspondent in Buenos Aires

purposes and benefits for which the services are run. The real control of the railways can only be by those who use them and by those who work in them. Railway workers, among them some who continually reported dangers on the lines, are now viciously attacked by *The Times* and the *Sun*.

To leave the service industries in the grip of capitalist purposes can only mean their further descent into chaos and misery. It is only the action of masses of people that can create the basis of solving these problems, with control by committees of workers and users and plans for development worked out by them and the unions. There must be a fight for such policies in the unions.

The Tory Party was defeated in 1979 because millions of people in Britain saw that privatisation was opening a bonanza for quick profit and worsening the conditions of workers and users. The mass of the population continues to be angry and frustrated as that continues under New Labour. The rank and file in all the service unions are now fuelled by the same anger and frustration.

But only the strength of masses can resolve this. Users must take a lesson or two from Argentina, see reports in this issue, not just to force government to make a shift to curtail some of the worst excesses but to bring the control and planning of the railways by workers and users committees. There will be more knowledge about hospitals and railways in those committees than among the financial 'Fat Cats' of the City.

22 December

A revolution of sorts

Unrest has been increasing slowly but surely for the past couple of months in spite of the trade union leaders' efforts to keep the fighting spirit of the grass roots as low as possible. In a way this was not much different from what has been happening in most of the countries of Latin America: desperate to recover some of its fading rate of profit, imperialism pressed for more "sacrifices" to pay the interest on the foreign debt. This meant drastic reductions in salaries, pensions, social security, education, health and whatever else was left of the old welfare state. Things got so bad that salaries in the public sector – after several cuts and reductions – were paid partly in pesos (the official Argentine currency) and partly in the 'fake' currencies that the governments of each province issued according to their own needs or whims and that not all providers accepted as valid currency. Further layoffs were carried out and the unemployment figures soared. There was no money in the streets. People's gas and electricity were cut off when the lodgers failed to pay for these commodities in due time.

Then the looting of the big supermarkets began. First it was timid groups of organised beggars.

In one case they were promised "a little something for Christmas" by the manager of a large supermarket. When they returned to fetch their presents, they found the gates closed and armed policemen trying to shove them away. They insisted that they had been promised help. Finally a small delegation was allowed in to "negotiate" with the management. Once inside they were told that they could take 70 parcels each containing a given amount of flour, oil and dry pasta. The representatives of the paupers said that before accepting or refusing they had to consult with those they stood for. ("How dare they?" the manager's face seemed to say). After a short assembly at the gates of the supermarket, the decision was: "let's take what they give and come back for more tomorrow".

The following day all hell broke loose: not only were dozens of supermarkets 'looted' or 'expropriated' or 'robbed' from those who robbed us, but important sectors of the middle class found this highly acceptable. While municipal workers of the city of Cordoba destroyed the Town Hall in repudiation of the economic measures taken by the government of the city, their example was followed by Entre Rios football fans who, when they discovered that tickets for an important match had been fiddled, decided to just walk into the stadium and let the police stop them if they can. Somebody described the situ-



ation as "an enormous stain of civil disobedience spreading all over the country". President de la Rúa came on TV to tell people that everything was just fine, that only small groups of misfits were creating unnecessary commotion but, just to make sure that wrongdoers do not invade the private property of decent citizens, he had decreed a state of emergency.

About half an hour after this speech, the Plaza de Mayo, the main square of the capital city and the site of many historic events connected to class struggle and which up to that moment was silent, dark and surrounded by police patrols, began to take a different life. Thousand of spontaneous demonstrators thronged from different neighbourhoods beating pots and pans, blowing whistles and clapping their hands. These were not political or trade union militants or activists. They were not the desperate hungry crowds looting the supermarkets. They were the urban middle class, the "new poor", the ones who had voted for de la Rúa just two years ago when he had promised to put an end to corruption, impunity and the already then visible process of very few getting very rich at the expense of many who were

becoming increasingly poor.

They came in family groups, the mama, the papa and the perambulator, the daughter and her boyfriend holding hands, the grandma holding up her pension cheque to show that she has still been unable to collect her meagre pension. They looked straight into the TV cameras and said that they were proud that the Argentine people had at long last recovered their dignity and will no longer be lied to in such a blatant way. They carried national flags and sang the national anthem several times. They seemed most surprised and outraged when the police actually charged at them with high-pressure water hoses, tear gases, and rubber bullets. But they showed a surprising amount of persistence and courage. Dispersed and chased away from the Plaza de Mayo, they re-grouped and returned, only to be chased away once more and then once more find a way back. People grabbed the fizzing tear gas bombs and threw them back at the police, they put up barricades, they threw stones... Among the main demands there was "Down with de la Rúa, Down with Cavallo and Down with Menem". Cavallo, minister of economy, a particu-

larly obnoxious figure was the president of the Central Bank during the military dictatorship and minister of economy with de la Rúa's predecessor, Menem, until a general strike drove him out of office. He returned with de la Rúa and his economic plan, imposed by the IMF and the World Bank contributed fundamentally to this outburst of anger. In the meantime, he advised the president of Ecuador on how to "make the country grow". That led to the Ecuador uprising and to the downfall of the government that employed him. What used to be the exclusive demand of our Party "Non-payment of the foreign debt" started appearing here and there.

Then the first death.

As the night turned into morning, the morning into afternoon, the battle continued, but the main characters of the drama changed. Left wing militants replaced the politically undefined and the Mothers of the Plaza intending to carry out their weekly round of the square. The Mothers is an association of the mothers of the missing persons kidnapped, tortured and killed during the military dictatorship. Ever since those days in the late seventies, they

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come to the Plaza and, donning white head kerchiefs, go round the square a couple of times, often accompanied by sympathisers. This has become a symbol and a ritual that even the military had to respect, much as they loathed it. It was a shock to many to realise that the police rode their horses into the group of the mothers and thus prevented them from continuing. But not even that scared the crowds. Then more deaths were reported. And the numbers of those wounded and arrested were growing.

Then pressure on de la Rúa began from different lobbies advising him to get rid of Cavallo and to save his own skin. But he remained adamant. More people went out into the street. There was further repression. There were some contradictions in the media regarding the exact number of casualties. The second day was drawing to an end when news came that Cavallo had been asked to resign. People cheered and said "Now, let us have his employer". Late in the evening de la Rúa resigned. This morning we gathered round the Congress to see him revoke the state of emergency, and go home after blaming the Peronists for his failure.

31 December

It is still Permanent!

During the week that elapsed since the first big outburst that ousted the de la Rúa-Cavallo administration, great efforts were made to create the impression that things were returning to normal. A smiling, exuberant and efficient-looking Rodriguez Saá replaced the grumpy de la Rúa. Saá's speech about suspending the payments of the crippling foreign debt was a welcome change. His prom-



ise to create a million new jobs sounded too good to be true, but people said that if he managed half of that, it would be good enough for a start. In the capital city, some old-age pensioners and some teachers collected their salaries. All this created an atmosphere of cautious relaxation in spite of the irritating behaviour displayed by at least one sector of what people here call "la clase política", meaning all those who in one way or the other have ever taken part in the government of the country. This kind of truce lasted through Christmas.

On the first working day after Xmas, however, trouble started all over again. People who went to the bank to collect their dues saw that the "corralito" was still there and the old age pensioners who had not yet collected in the first days of thaw had to stand for anything up to eight hours in the never ending queues that wound their way round the blocks under the blazing summer sun. They commented that the near-convict Menem had been a guest in the Pink House and that Saá, appointed president for two months, time enough to call for new elections, was seriously considering staying in the office for the two years that de la Rúa had left in-

complete. Then, in one of the banks the drumming was heard again. As those who were standing in the queues did not have their pans with them, they started beating on the armoured door of the bank.

Then the pans started sounding again in Cordoba. Do you remember Cordoba? That is where the riots started before Christmas.

Then a bus company in Mar del Plata, a famous spa on the Atlantic Ocean, dismissed some drivers. This company has been reducing the staff for quite a long time now, but this time it happened just once too often. So a strike broke out. Strike pickets became violent. They burned some buses.

Edenor is one of the electric light companies that fed on the privatisation of what had been the old National Board of Electricity. As in practically all those privatised companies, it became considerably more expensive than the old national board but hardly more efficient. It became customary for them to cut off the lights in different districts in the hottest part of the year, when refrigerators and air conditioners demanded a supply of energy that the company was unable to provide. For years people made sar-

castic comments on this situation, but in general put up with it. Not this time. When the lights went out in the district of Palermo, people went out into the streets and started drumming on their pans.

As the drumming became louder and the TV cameras started spreading the news to the rest of the country, suddenly the lights appeared. The crowd cheered. They have just won another battle that goes to prove that there was very little patience left now that people know the way to win.

Railway workers went on strike because they had not been paid their wages before Christmas. The private company tried to make the senior managers drive the trains. Mysteriously some trains caught fire. Nobody did it. It just happened. Angry commuters threatened to sue the company.

The atmosphere was getting more and more tense. There were demonstrations against the corrupt judges who had acquitted Menem. Then the media confirmed that Grosso, a Peronist member of the Parliament was nominated head of the cabinet. Once again all hell broke loose. Once again it was the mama the papa and the perambulator who walked out into Plaza de Mayo beating the pans. This time it was "out with Grosso, Menem and the rest of the corrupt swindlers!"

The most daring ones produced aerosols and painted the walls of the Pink House with slogans against corruption and dishonest officials.

Then a different group appeared. Most of them were very young and they tried to force their way into the Pink House. So the mama and the papa sector left the Plaza and went towards the Congress, which is about a mile away. The unidentified young men were there too. This time they actually

got into the building and started burning all they could lay their hands on and breaking everything that was breakable. This time they were suppressed. If official statistics are to be believed at all, however, there were more casualties among the policemen than among the rowdy demonstrators.

The original demonstrators withdrew and TV cameras swept the Plaza and the surroundings of the Congress speculating as to the nature of the "infiltrated misfits" who had spoilt the "peaceful expression of people". Speakers mentioned that a federal judge had all the tapes of the pressmen confiscated in order to try and identify those who had created "this loathsome festival of violence". There were comments to the effect that the mode of protest would have to change in order to prevent future "infiltrations", but a voice was heard saying "That judge wants the recording to make sure that we do not identify the provoking agents they themselves have sent to justify a repression". Obviously not everything could be filtered and some things leaked.

Epilogue

A bar at a service centre in a normally calm and very proper neighbourhood of Floresta. Three young men chatting over a beer commenting on a newsreel on the TV. It was a replay of one of the scenes of the recent events in Plaza de Mayo. They laughed at a scene where the police had to withdraw behind their shields. They made some comments to the effect "that serves them right! Let them have some of their own medicine" and things like that. A retired policeman who was at that moment working as a private security man, pulled out his gun and shot the three young men to death. Just executed them with everybody frozen in horror.

But the paralysis of the onlookers lasted but a few seconds. Next thing there were dozens of people trying to lynch the now not so brave representative of bourgeois law and order. Dozen soon became hundreds. Special troops were called in to whisk the gunman to safety. The neighbours surrounded the police station. The first attempt was to frighten them away with water, tear gas and rub-





ber bullets. Soon it became evident that the police were shooting directly into the crowd. An old lady came out yelling: "For God's sake, stop shooting! You are killing Argentines!"

She received a bullet in her back for her efforts. Far from discouraged, the crowd stopped a water truck coming to disperse them by throwing a huge stone right into the driver's cabin. Housewives in slippers on their feet marched into the streets clapping their hands and chanting: "This is the end of impunity", "This habit of killing will be stopped". A young man with his face covered yelled into the camera: "This is our Intifada! Death to the murderers!"

Floresta is still a battlefield. Argentina is still a battlefield. New layers of activists crop up all over the place. They look back to the existing models when their action begins. But they do not stop there. They learn with every step they take. Soon they will learn that if all this heroism is to yield the necessary fruit, they will have to build a revolutionary leadership.

19 January

No truce

Friends and relatives of the three young men murdered by the police in Floresta have become an ad-hoc organisation of human rights. Once a week they march through the streets of their parish (one of the most densely populated in Buenos Aires) and demand that the policeman who had publicly executed three young men for voicing criticism of the repression on the 19th and 20th December should be tried and punished. Last week they led a crowd of 2,500 pan-beaters and were joined by relatives of other victims of police brutality.

Another pan-beating session took place at a busy corner in the capital city. It happened quite spontaneously: a group of bank customers got fed up with queuing in the vain hope of collecting their dues that have been de facto expropriated by the very capitalist government. They started beating the pans demanding an end to the restrictive measures known as play-pen and were soon joined by others. Traffic was interrupted

for several hours but drivers did not resent it. Quite the contrary, they hooted their horns in a friendly greeting to the demonstrators. Anti-playpen, anti-judges and anti-police brutality are at the moment the most frequent demands of those spontaneous demonstrators.

About 400 neighbours of La Matanza responded to an initiative of the teachers trade union and marched to Edenor, the private electricity company that replaced the former state-owned electricity board known as Secba, to request that their supplies of electricity should not be cut. La Matanza is an essentially working class district and a great number of its inhabitants have failed to pay their light bills due to the recent crisis. They had agreed to walk peacefully, not causing any break-ages, to make sure that damage to the premises could not be used as an excuse for an eventual repression. The workers of Edenor applauded them as they marched in. The bosses promised to suspend the cuts for three days at the end of which they invited a delegation to come and discuss some kind of alternative which they would prepare for them.

Perhaps the most 'picturesque' demonstration took place in the northern province of Salta where a priest together with a group of parishioners, most of them of the Aymará extraction, crucified themselves on the lamp posts. The crucifixion looked realistic enough, though the crucified were not nailed to the post, but tied with ropes. They supported this position for five hours while the other members of the community sang songs and kept vigil.

The devaluation of the peso is a veiled way of reducing the purchasing power of the workers' salaries. Not everybody realises this and some honestly think that since they do not buy or sell in dollars, this really does not affect them. The sad truth is only now becoming apparent. As national industry has been destroyed in the previous economic plans, we consume a lot of imported commodities which have to be paid in dollars. The origin of this process can be seen in the seventies. The first steps towards destroying national industry were challenged by the

working class with such a force that it took a military coup with its sequel of 30,000 missing people to stop the opposition.

At the moment Argentina has an economic structure of a typically dependant country: it can sell some raw material, it must buy all the industrial products. From this point of view, the country has receded back to pre-Peron times. Devaluation hence means that the price of practically everything we buy will go up. Some suppliers have already started pushing the prices up, and when this is challenged they withdraw the articles from the shops and create a crazy demand. This is especially criminal in the cases of some medicines. Doctors, nurses and diabetic patients have been demonstrating demanding that the government supply hospitals with insulin at pre-devaluation prices.

The above examples refer mainly to the struggle of the people, which means large sectors of population that include workers, petty

bourgeois, intellectuals, students, etc. The working class as such, though active in spite of all the pacifying efforts of their leaders, has not so far taken the centre of the stage. As a rule, the media speak but a little about the more proletarian struggles. But these struggles do take place and a development of awareness becomes visible. Municipal workers in Cordoba are still on strike, and every time a factory gets behind with payments or threatens layoffs, strikes break out without waiting for the trade union leaders to come and do something about it. In a dairy, about 300 workers occupied the premises after the management had tried to lock them out.



Appeal

To the committee of Solidarity with Argentine workers:

Dear friends,

We found out that there are activities of solidarity with the workers and people of Argentina. We are very grateful for that class solidarity. The solidarity and the unity of the workers of the world are central to oppose the attacks of imperialism.

In Argentina we have had an important revolutionary triumph that in 10 days removed two puppet governments of imperialism.

But the fight continues, because the material reasons that motivated the insurrection still exist. Our country continues to be dominated by imperialism and the application of their plans. Today in Argentina the teachers, as well as workers (those with jobs and those without jobs) must continue with strikes, marches, occupation of roads, to obtain elementary things: food, payment of wages, payment of pensions and medical attention.

We enclose the last official statement from the leadership council of our Union in which we called for the fight to continue for our most elementary rights. All exam-

ples of international solidarity will be very important for our struggle.

With Fraternal Greetings
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General Secretary

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SOLIDARITY WITH WORKERS AND PEOPLE OF ARGENTINA

"De La Rúa and Cavallo, Menem and Duhalde, Ruckauf, Door and Rodríguez Saá [ex-Presidents, Presidents and Peronists and others] are responsible for the social catastrophe and the economic disorganisation that is destroying the life of millions of Argentines. The parties that dominate the Congress share the responsibility for this disaster. They do not have the capacity or the authority to form a government...

"This is why people rose, winning the streets, cutting the roads, occupying the work places, marching to the Congress. For this reason, we reject the continuity of the role of the state and the intent of continuing the bloody repression against people in struggle, demanding punishment to the culprits and the freedom of all the detainees.

...We are in the year of the biggest harvest in history but millions are hungry, the productive apparatus is paralysed and there is an unprecedented number of unemployed. It is the terminal state of a system of exploitation, of an economic, social and political organization. Enough!"

So began the leaflet issued on 22 December by the FOS (our sister organisation in Argentina), the PO and UI (Workers Power and United Left). That was before Saá became President for seven, forced to resign by the out bursting of more anger on the streets.

What happened in Argentina is a new level of struggle, a popular revolt of the people and the working class against a State and Government that for 25 years has sold off Argentine industry and assets from the plans of the IMF and the transnationals. Such policies of selling off the banks, the oil, drugs companies, railways, land, water, electricity, gas to the transnationals in the USA, Spain, Britain and many other European countries has meant massive sackings and poverty. While all this was going on the foreign debt grew from 8bn dollars at the beginning of the military dictatorship (March 1976) to 160bn dollars by 2001. During this time Argentina repaid 200bn dollars, 25 times more than it owed in 1976.



**Demonstration outside World Bank
by Milton Slater**

Tony Blair held a press conference on a visit to Brazil in July 2001 where was widely reported to have praised Argentina's spending cuts as a "significant step forward". These steps were: cutting wages and pensions by 13 per cent, overseeing the fall of 3.5 million people into poverty, joining 11.5 million already below the poverty line. Meanwhile British Gas, Royal Dutch/Shell Group, ICI, Anglian Water, British Telecom, the National Grid, HSBC and others have all grabbed what they can of the privatised industry in the last ten years since the peso was tied to the dollar. The British multinationals and the Blair Government alongside the World Bank have been active in, or supportive of, the looting of Argentina.

Argentina can only be rescued by the actions of workers, the exploited and oppressed. They were not a mob, many districts created new organisations and a new movement of self-organisation bringing many of the left together with the communities, students, teachers, workers and homeless. There needs to be a united movement with the factories and workplaces and in that process a new revolutionary leadership can emerge in the country.

British labour and community organisations: support the workers and the people in Argentina. Encourage your organisations to demand: cancel the Argentine foreign debt, freedom for the detainees, and punishment for all those who killed protestors.

What war is this?

Martín Hernández, a member of the leadership of the International Workers League - Fourth International looks at the underlying reasons behind Bush's 'war against terrorism' and discusses the attitude that socialists should take towards it. The article has been edited. The full version appears in the latest edition of *Marxism Alive* <http://www.marxismalive.org>

There is no doubt that the raids on New York and Washington will have such historic importance that for a long time we shall talk about a before and an after the raids. The importance of these facts, however, induces a lot of people to draw wrong conclusions about the character of the war and its origins.

Contrasting with what is normally thought, the war of USA against Afghanistan does not stem out of the raids. To think that the raids (considered as acts of war) spawned the war would mean to pose the capitalist norm that violence spawns more violence. This interpretation does not explain the war, let alone the raids themselves.

If we practice a simple exercise of ignoring for a while the 'yells' on both sides. . . we see that we have the most typical of the conflicts of our epoch: a war for the conquest of a new colony in a strategic region of the planet.

A war that tastes of oil

The USA did not wish to colonise Afghanistan only, but the entire region that used to be within the scope of interest of the USSR or of what was part of it, as is the case of Azerbaijan, Cazaquistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. This region is strategic for imperialism, for vast reserves of oil and gas are to be found there, much richer than those of the Persian Gulf, and within this, Afghanistan is the key country because, from the geographic point of view, it is the link between Central Asia and Middle East.

If the war started in Afghanistan and not in any of the other countries mentioned, it is due to the fact that that five of the leading oil companies of USA (Chevron, Conoco, Texaco, Mobil Oil and Unocal) have been carrying out agreements worth billions of dollars with them (including Russia) in order to exploit the enormous oil reserves in the area. The problem was that the Taliban refused to sign similar agreements about the passing of an important gas pipeline and oil pipeline and this disagreement meant that the works, started by UNocal, were interrupted in 1998. In this way imperialist investments in the region as a whole were challenged.

Socialists and wars

Every time imperialist powers declared war to conquer new markets and colonies they did so in the name of noble causes, fundamentally in the name of defence of the fatherland.

This campaign of the imperialists, leaning on the patriotic feelings that every war arouses in the masses, has always been successful and has played havoc with the awareness of not only the working class, but of socialist organisations. May it suffice to remember that in the First World War, most of the parties of the II International rallied round their respective bourgeoisies and so became accomplices of the imperialist butchery.

Real socialists, however, have always fought against this ideology, against this national chauvinism. They asserted that workers have no fatherland and during the imperialist wars they fought for the unity of the international working class insisting that, instead of confronting each other, workers should stand together to confront the bourgeoisie inside their own countries in order to transform the imperialist war into a civil war and so conquer the power for the working class. But not all the wars have the same character. Socialist knew how to identify different types of war and, consequently, different policies. While identifying some wars as inter-imperialist, they identified others as wars of an imperialist power against an oppressed or dependant country. In this case the policy of the socialist has been different: they stood firmly by the oppressed country against the oppressing country and have even regarded the patriotism of the oppressed country as progressive, making a clear difference between the patriotism of an oppressing country and the patriotism of an oppressed country.

Lenin used to point out socialists admit the legitimate and just character of the defence of the fatherland or defensive war. If, for example, tomorrow Morocco were to declare war on France, India on England, Persia or China on Russia, etc, these wars would be just and defensive, regardless of who at-

Afghanistan

tacked first, and every socialist would be wanting the victory of these dependent, oppressed states, deprived of their rights, over the oppressors, plunderers based on slavery.

As we can see, according to Lenin, the defence of the oppressed country was unconditional, regardless of the political regime that this given country might have. On the other hand, Trotsky was even more explicit and he insisted that in a conflict of this type socialists had to stand by the oppressed country even if it were a barbaric monarchy or if it supported a fascist regime. If there is war between the king of Tunisia and France, progress will be represented by the barbaric monarch, not by the imperialist republic. Hygiene is very important in human culture. But if murder has been committed, it is of no import whether the murderer had or had not washed his hands before committing his crime. To substitute the real aims of the struggling imperialist bands by political or moral abstractions, does not mean struggling for democracy but to help the bandits to conceal their theft, pillage and violence.

A new war, a new controversy

Faced with the war wagged by imperialism on Afghanistan, several revolutionary, Leninist and Trotskyist organisations failed to follow their teachers advice. They refuse to stand in the Taliban trench.

There is nothing new about the argument used by these trends. It is exactly the same one that was used by several trends during the Falkland War, during the Gulf War or during the Yugoslavian war: the dictatorial nature of these regimes is said to be an impediment for us to undertake any kind of. In this new war, however, new arguments appear that may be worthwhile to discuss.

The first argument is that we, the socialists, cannot stand by Afghanistan because Marx teaches us that workers have no fatherland, and the other argument is that any attempt at carrying out any kind of unity of action with the Taliban would be a suicide, for this reactionary trend would kill the revolutionaries as soon as the war is over in the same way as the fundamentalist in Iran did.

Both arguments deserve a deep discussion between revolutionary Marxists. Seemingly, this discussion may not have a major importance nowadays, because Taliban is being defeated and yet that is not so; it is not only a question of discussing a position with respect to Taliban, but with respect to all the other trends, or even governments which, even if they are not revolutionary, may in the nearest future have to challenge imperialism.

socialists do have a fatherland

It is true that according to Marxism, workers have no fatherland. More than that: we, Socialists, fight for the abolition of national frontiers and of countries. We assert that frontiers between countries are artificial and serve only the interests of the different bourgeoisies and are an obstacle for the development of productive forces. We, the socialists, struggle for the widest unity of all the workers of the entire world, regardless their origin and we also struggle against every bourgeoisie regardless the country they come from. That is why we sympathise with every attempt of the different nations to get organised in a higher form of unity, as was once the case of the former USSR.

But it is necessary to bear in mind that every war of conquest is carried out by reinforcing some frontiers (those of the imperialist countries) and destroying others (those of the countries to be conquered) and that is something no socialist can sympathise.

Is unity of action with Taliban possible?

The possibility that at one moment or another the Taliban will persecute the revolutionaries and will even kill them.

This possibility is real because the Taliban are not a working class trend, they are not socialist and revolutionaries. They are a deeply reactionary trend with many fascist traits, a trend that was forced in defence of their own interests to take the progressive step of challenging imperialism politically and militarily. How far will this progressive course last them? That is hard to say, but what is clear is that they will not consistently take it to the very end and that is why unavoidably whatever progressive elements they had will turn into their opposite. For example: in order to challenge imperialism, Taliban distributed weapons among the population; but the Taliban will not agree to have armed population deciding democratically the fate of the nation at war and more likely than not whoever tries to do so will have to pay for it with his life.

It would be a mistake, however, to believe that this is a characteristic only of the fundamentalists, in this case of the Taliban. This trait is shared by all bourgeois or bureaucratic trends, be it Islamic or not. Be it fundamentalist or not. That is what history teaches us.

In China, Chang Kai Shek massacred thousands of communists with who he hand jointly confronted the Japanese Empire. In Viet Nam, Stalinists murdered hundreds of Trotskyists who were together fighting against the French Empire. In the Spanish

When an imperialist attack is at stake, we the so-

civil war, in the common struggle against Franco, Stalinists killed a great many anarchists, Trotskyists and POUM members. In Iran, after defeating the bloodthirsty dictatorship of the Shah, the fundamentalists persecuted workers and left wing organisations. In Nicaragua, after defeating Somoza, Sandinism expelled and handed the revolutionaries from Simon Bolivar who had fought together with them against the dictatorship over to the bourgeois authorities of Panama. And yet, all these tragic historical experience fails to induce us to think that these revolutionaries were wrong during the Spanish civil war or during any of the above quoted cases when they were in the same military field as the Stalinists or the republican bourgeoisie.

It is true that these crimes of the counterrevolution were often fostered by capitulating policies applied by the forces that became their victims. This was clearly the case of the Chinese experience when Stalinism transformed the policy of unity in action with Chang Kai Chek (which was correct) into a shameful capitulation, to the point that they dissolved the Communist Party inside the Kuomintang, a fact that made the task of massacring the Communists. But when we are talking about the necessary unity in action with Taliban, we are not talking of Stalinist-like capitulations but of a unity of action with historically hostile forces as what the Bolsheviks did with Kerenski whom they joined in a common action to halt the Kornilov coup.

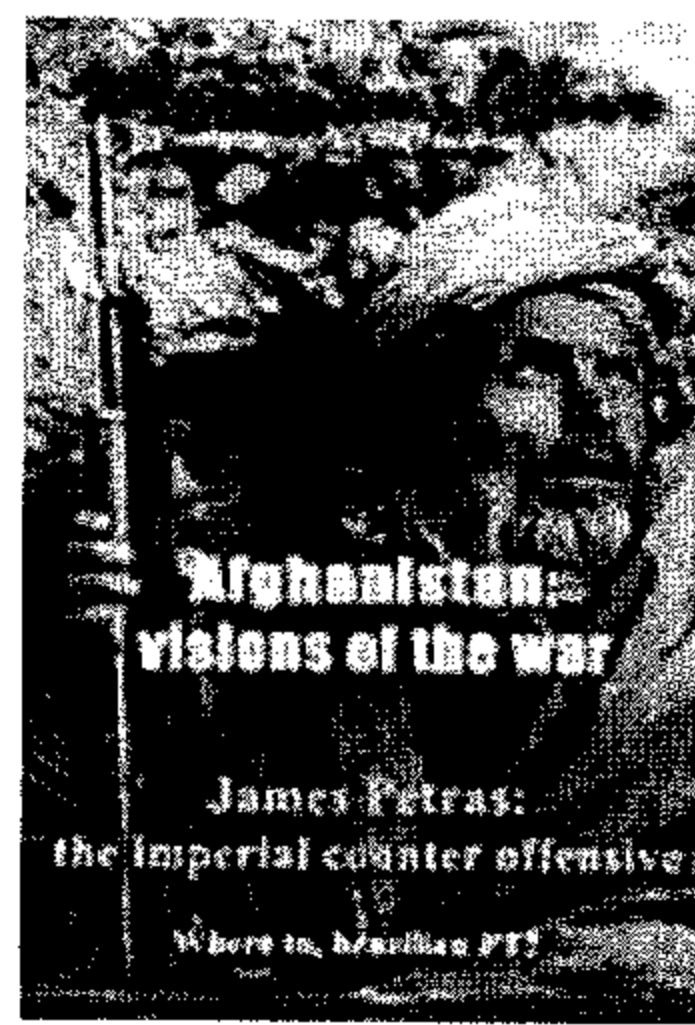
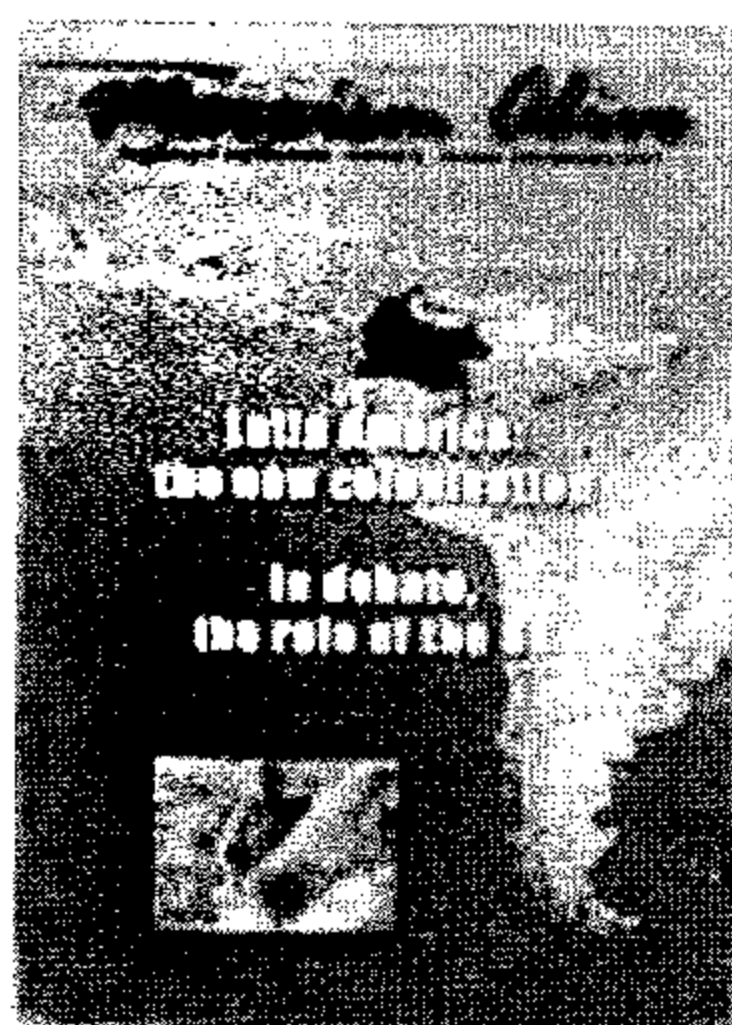
Notwithstanding, no matter how correct the way in which the unity of action with the fundamentalists of the Taliban is carried out may be, there will be no stopping them later on from persecuting the revolutionaries. This threat, however, will not be eliminated in case we refuse to seek unity of action with the fundamentalists. Quite the contrary.

Fundamentalists today are winning prestige among

ample sectors of the masses due to the fact that they are regarded as the most consistent fighters against imperialism even if we know that they are not. Just have a look at what is happening in Palestine where it took the fundamentalist trends a very short period of time to win enormous weight in the mass movement. We must also bear in mind that the call for a common action with fundamentalists is essentially addressed to the masses who wish to confront imperialism. That is why revolutionaries should not limit themselves to seek unity in action but should also defend unconditionally those fundamentalists who are attacked by imperialism, such as is the case of Pakistan and more clearly of Afghanistan, where imperialism together with the Northern Alliance massacred all the prisoners in a jail in Mazar-e-Sharif.

If the revolutionaries do not lead this fight, they will be seen and quite justly so as hesitating in the face of imperialism and this will be used in the future by the fundamentalists, basking in prestige for having fought against imperialism to attack the revolutionaries.

Those who now say that there cannot be unity in action with the Taliban because they might, in the future, kill the revolutionaries, are stuck in a deep contradiction. They cannot assert this without at the same time challenging a major part of the policy of the revolutionaries of all the century that has just ended. What is more: they are challenging what is probably the most advanced revolutionary process of the world revolution, the Intifada, which is nothing else but a great movement of unity in action against imperialism and Israel in which several fundamentalist trends take part with an important weight.



Forgotten Hero

The Life and Times of Edward Rushton

Liverpool's Blind Poet
Revolutionary Republican
& Anti-Slavery Fighter
by Bill Hunter



Published by



In recent years there has been a rapid growth in the publication of books relating to local history. Many of these have traded on a sepia nostalgia for an age gone by. Bill Hunter's work can in no way be regarded as such a publication. He interweaves Rushton's poetry intelligently with supporting text, allowing us to glimpse the contemporary world of Rushton.

Paul Cosgrove - Centre for Words (from the forward).

Rushton should be, but is not, a well known figure in the history of Liverpool. Bill Hunter says: "I wrote this book on Edward Rushton in an attempt to rescue from obscurity, this uncompromising fighter for the common people, and to pay tribute to his indomitable spirit."

He was born on November 18 1756, in John St., Liverpool and, before his eleventh birthday, was apprenticed as a seaman. When he was 18, he sailed as mate in an American ship, which picked up slaves in Africa. Rushton protested at the treatment of the slaves and was threatened with irons. Later the slaves contracted contagious ophthalmia, a disease which, in most cases, brought blindness in three weeks. The crew battened down the hatches. Rushton, after arguments with the captain was allowed to take food and drink to the slaves, caught the disease, and was blinded.

He wrote poetry, and became a tireless campaigner against slavery and against the press gangs led by naval officers, kidnapping sailors for the navy. He was a revolutionary republican, supporter of the American war for Independence, the French revolution, and the struggle of the Polish and Irish people. He started a paper and naval officers threatened him when he wrote articles condemning the press gangs.

Rushton had supported American independence but ended his poem, American Independency, with the following verse:

*How can you, who have felt
the oppressor's hard hand,*

*Who for freedom all perils
would brave,*

*How can you enjoy peace,
while one foot of your land*

*Is disgraced by the toil of a
slave!"*

After the American Revolution he wrote to Washington. He repeated his support for the revolution but condemned Washington sharply for owning slaves. Washington sent the letter back. Rushton wrote to Thomas Paine suggesting they have a joint campaign against slavery. Paine refused.

He founded a school for the blind. In the middle of the nineteenth century, the Blind School moved to Hardman St., to a building now occupied by the Merseyside Trade Union and Community Resource and Unemployment Centre.

The book can be ordered direct from editor@livinghistory.org.uk. Costs 6 pounds (including P&P).

Second World Social Forum

30,000 people from 150 countries marched in Porto Alegre, Brazil against imperialism last month before the opening of the second World Social Forum. They included contingents from the trade union movement, students, blacks and gays, with large workers' delegations coming from Colombian and Argentinean. They took over the whole avenue of Borges de Medeiros and sang the International.

In the morning of 31 January, about 400 people took part in the forum of work and trade unionism. The event was organization by several organisations including the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, World Trade Union Federation, International Organization of the Workers - (mainly Central America and Caribbean), World Confederation of Work and European Confederation of Unions and the Brazilian CUT.

The most speeches centred on globalisation and super-exploitation. However, it was highly noticeable the impact that the crisis and the popular revolt in Argentina had in the Forum, it was practically an obligatory reference of every speech. One of the Argentinean trade unionists (CTA) said that Argentina is on the edge of 'dissolution as a country'.

There were a number of controversies, particularly about the war, globalisation, socialism and other themes, some of the differences have already been reported in Marxism Alive. More detailed reports from the Forum will follow.

Major blow to workers and tenants

Frank Fitzmaurice from Defend Council Housing in Kowsley near Liverpool, looks at why his estate voted for privatisation

Despite a vigorous campaign by trade unions and residents Knowsley council recently won a ballot to sell-off all its housing stock (17,000 dwellings) by a 74% yes vote on a 58% turnout. This result, along with the sell-off of the St. Helens housing stock (14,000 dwellings), is a major blow to all tenants and workers on Merseyside.

These sell-offs are part of an ongoing programme by New Labour to privatize all of the 3.2 million council dwellings in Britain within 10 years. By no means all of these sell-off attempts have been successful, Southwark council voted down a proposal to privatize its 50,000 council stock and Aylesbury tenants also recently voted against sell-off. In Birmingham and Glasgow, with over 80,000 council dwellings each, the vote has been delayed.

If New Labour succeeds in its aims it will be a severe blow to the living standards of all workers especially the low paid. Housing Associations are directly accountable to the banks through the business plans, which are legally enforceable on all officers, including elected tenants representatives, drawn up when the associations are formed. Without the existence of council housing, rents will soon rise to the level of private landlords, almost double those for council tenants and, in the South East, three times as high.

In addition, in its May 2000 Green Paper on housing New

Labour states that rents should reflect not only the size and condition of a property *but also its location*. (The 'independent advisers, paid by the council, said the figure was 70% location, 30% size and condition). Thus 'social housing' will be firmly in the grip of market forces and the poor will be decanted into the worst locations and pay through the nose for the privilege.

It is relevant to ask how this measure, which negates the gains of workers in the last century, was carried through in a staunch Labour area, steeped in the history of class struggle. A look at the ballot results shows that over 40% abstained. This should not be put down to apathy. The tenants who voted for sell-off did so because they saw it as the only way to obtain desperately needed repairs and renovations. However, despite the barrage of propaganda from the Council, fewer than 45% of tenants voted for sell-off. I firmly believe that those who abstained did so because they had no faith in any of their elected representatives to carry forward a fight for resources for badly needed renovations if the housing stock stayed in council hands, but could not bring themselves to vote for sell-off.

The tenants contempt for Councillors is richly deserved. The vote for sell-off was pushed through the council under threat of expulsion for any Labour councillor who voted against. So none

did, although 12 of the 15 Labour councillors voted in favour.

Through the process more councillors have been elected on the unions and tenants has been supported by the Labour Party. Labour Councils are not the 'anti-state' dog in the manger that the Labour Party would have us believe. The Labour Party has not the last word on this matter. Knowsley council's £100 million hospital was built with only the Labour Party's support and not a penny in private from the Labour Council. If they will still have the grace to accuse voters of apathy when they abstain in large numbers in the May election.

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temporarily that he had ever had an "inappropriate relationship" with White House intern Monica Lewinsky.

In Mr. Clinton's case, the pretzel-induced amnesia eventually wore off, with the former President recovering his memory, albeit partially, while giving a deposition under oath.

As of last night, things were "back to normal" at the White House, with one observer reporting that Attorney General John Ashcroft, Vice-President Dick Cheney and other key administration officials were seen sharing a big bag of pretzels.

Anon, Canada

Worm's Eye View

**"THE WORMS OF THE EARTH
WILL CRUELLY DEVOUR THE
LIONS, LEOPARDS AND
WOLVES...AND THE LITTLE AND
COMMON PEOPLE WILL DESTROY
ALL TYRANTS AND TRAITORS."**

*14TH CENTURY FRIAR, JEAN DE
ROQUERAILLADE*

Rare Case of Pretzel- Induced Amnesia

President Bush has "fully recovered" from a fainting spell he suffered after swallowing a pretzel yesterday, a White House doctor says, with one very minor side effect: partial amnesia.

The bump that Mr. Bush took on the head during his fall has left the President with no memory of ever having spoken to anyone from Enron, the Houston-based energy giant.

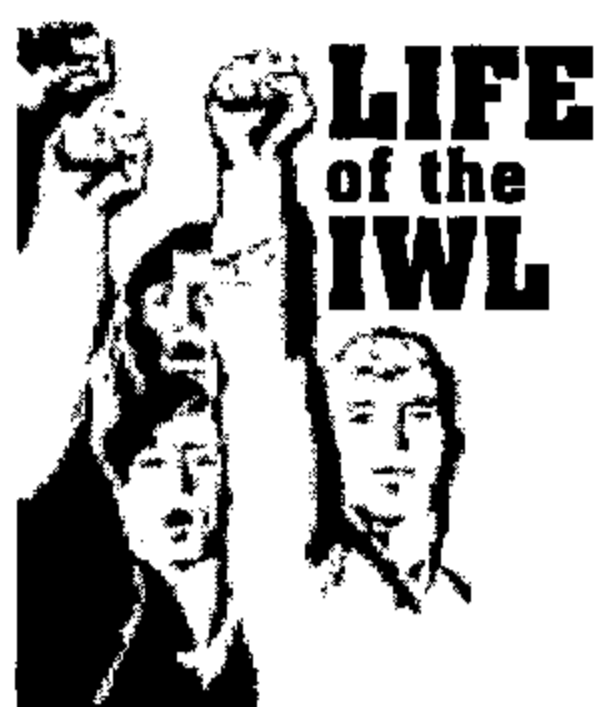
"Apparently, the very minor trauma to the President's head only affected that part of the human brain that processes memories related to embattled energy companies," said Dr. Richard Tubb, the official White House physician.

While unusual, pretzel-induced amnesia is not without precedent, medical experts say.

In the mid-1980's, President Bush's father, then serving as Vice-President, swallowed a pretzel which caused him to forget crucial details of the Iran-Contra scandal.

And a late-night pretzel-swallowing binge caused former President Bill Clinton to forget

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20th Anniversary of the IWL

Some 1,300 people attended the 20th anniversary celebration of the founding of the International Workers' League - Fourth International in Brazil on 2 February.

Representatives of the IWL's sections from Argentina, Paraguay, Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Portugal, Spain, Belgium, Germany, Russia, Ukraine and, of course, Brazil took part in the meeting. In addition, representatives from the International Socialist Organization, the International Trotskyist Opposition and the Brazilian Left Workers Party and trade unionists of the CUT were at the meeting.

Zé Maria, on behalf of the PSTU, spoke about the importance of the construction of the revolutionary party and made a call to all those present who were already part of the international to join.

Comrade Cabezas reminded the meeting that IWL was born after a hard battle against the United Secretariat in defence of the strategy of the construction of Trotskyist parties independent of the old and new reformist organisations. He said that, although, in the last 20 years, the IWL had been through difficult periods, its highest merit was its resistance to the revisionism that took hold of most of the organizations of the revolutionary left after the fall of the Berlin wall and the end of the Soviet Union. Its organic connec-

tion with the labour movement is what made it possible for that IWL not only to survive as a socialist and revolutionary organization, but to understand and answer in a principled way the main events in the class struggle and to move forward in the construction of parties, such as the PSTU in Brazil.

After the speeches, the party continued with a lot of samba, forró and rock.

Proposed Fusion in Spain

The Spanish Revolutionary Left and the Workers Revolutionary Party have begun a process whose objective is unification.

The process is based on an agreement over a number of issues including the anti-war movement, privatisation and the national question. The two groups have published a thesis that shows the political basis for the fusion. It starts: "The axis of the world situation is governed by the phenomenon of capitalist globalization that supposes a jump in the process of internationalization of capital and of the accumulation of wealth in fewer and fewer hands"

"The new developments in the European left - electoral success of LO (Lutte Ouvriere) and LCR (Revolutionary Communist League) in France, the emergence of the Scottish SSP, the Left Block in Portugal, etc - and particularly the Socialist Alliance in England and Wales, points the way to convergence that we will also have to reproduce in the Spanish State because it responds to the necessities of the objective situation and of the struggle.

The full text is available only in Spanish, but we will publish part of it in the next issue of Socialist Voice.